

Feds to Reconsider Island's Designation

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Long Island may be getting its identity back.

Federal officials are going to reconsider their controversial decision to remove the Island's metropolitan statistical area, or MSA status, local congressional representatives said Friday.

The initial decision, made earlier this month, to lump Long Island in with New York City angered local politicians and advocates, who worried about the region's federal funding and "unique" identity.

Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington) said Friday that Bush administration officials told him Thursday that all recent metropolitan statistical designations, including the Island's, would be reopened for consideration. Washington would create a new public comment period ending Sept. 30. "They're giving us another at-bat and we can't blow it now," Israel said.

Members of the congressional delegation and officials from the White House Office of Management and Budget could not predict the final outcome. OMB officials said a new comment period has yet to begin. But Israel insisted Bush administration officials assured him the period will start soon.

The moves come after weeks of meetings, phone calls and impromptu discussions in Capitol hallways with White House officials, said Israel and Rep. Peter King (R-Seaford). New York's two senators had also voiced their opposition to the new designation.

"A public comment period is good, but we still have to get them to back off," said Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.). "The fight is clearly not over."

OMB acting director Augustine T. Smythe said in a letter to Israel and King on Thursday that even under the new Metropolitan Division designation, the Island's federal funding formula would remain the same.

King said Smythe's letter provides the protection the Island needs. "I still want to get it [the designation] changed, and I still want to push ahead, but I feel very secure the way it is now," King said.

Other federal officials, including Schumer, and some area business leaders and advocates remain skeptical, saying that only the MSA status would ensure appropriate funding for housing and health care.

"That's the truest picture of how we live and what it costs to live here," said Long Island Housing

Partnership president Jim Morgo.

Said Long Island Association government affairs vice president Mitch Pally: "If it doesn't mean anything, then why change it in the first place?"

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